

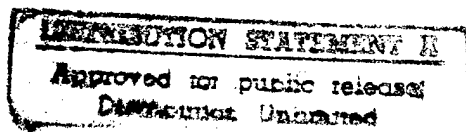
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## **Coaching - A Means to Improve Employee Productivity**

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### **SURVIVING THE NINETIES**

Management of human resources has become an increasingly significant factor in providing our military with a competent and ready force structure. As national defense budget allocations have dwindled and will continue to do so in the near years, productivity has become the front runner of Department Of Defense and Congressional issues. To operate as a viable business in the environment of today is to assure survival as more and more DOD activities search for alternate means of resourcing. It is not enough to reach out for additional resources; DOD must manage what is available as effectively as possible and that means enhancing the productivity of today's workers.

Frank Cipolla, assistant to the Director, National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), sees human resource management as key to addressing the uncertainties of the '90s. The unpredictability of the labor workforce, changes in workplace technology, organizational structures, and the international climate, plus downsizing of the Department of Defense, all require federal managers to focus on the human resource issue if we are to succeed in accomplishing our work (Pitts, 1992, p.49).

### **DOWNSIZING**

In accordance with Congressional mandates and directives from the DOD, downsizing has begun and will continue into the near future. How does this affect federal managers and relate to management styles and coaching? Simply put, managers must attempt to decrease the effects of downsizing on the workforce. During and following downsizing, organizations need to regroup, and the executives must set the tone by acknowledging the human side of downsizing. They need to talk to employees as if they were selling them on the business rationale for downsizing and convincing them of new opportunities available once the organization has become "lean and mean" (Personnel, 1991, p.17).

Survivors of downsizing, those who remain, will be changed. Many will be concerned about long-term job security, promotion and advancement. Others may find themselves in redesigned and unfamiliar jobs. Still others will distrust and resent management. A 1990 study by the American Society of Training and Development indicated the credibility of senior management dropped to 35 percent after a downsizing or restructuring. Yet, an organization can lessen the pain of downsizing. Efforts need to be systematic, with clear and consistent communication. Many organizations use coaching and mentoring - not only to equip managers to be better managers, but to bring employees into closer alignment with the new organizational goals and priorities (Clark and Koonce, 1995, p.25).

Employees need to be involved in the regrouping efforts to help them feel like part of the architectural committee on change rather than victims of change. Coaching employees is a form of allowing involvement in all of the employees' activities and the activities of the organization. Coaching can assist management and the employees in dealing with the effects of downsizing and aftershocks associated with it by empowering them to have some degree of freedom in determining the structure of the workplace after the significant reductions are over.

### **COACHING AS A MANAGEMENT STYLE**

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Coaching is a management style that includes employees in the process of determining their relationship to the organization and through personal contact with the supervisor, makes the employee a part of the decision-making process and more involved in his or her future. Particularly in an organization experiencing downsizing, low morale due to constant change, low morale due to ineffective management and other factors which frustrate employees and complicate their association with the organization, coaching can improve conditions and self-esteem. Todd White, chairman of Blessing/White, a Princeton, NJ based training and development firm, states with managers and employees acting as a team, striving for the best performance possible from each individual, workers will feel more motivated and productive.

The view of the manager as coach and as creator of a culture for coaching is a new paradigm for management, especially in the highly structured environment of the federal workplace. It is a new set of assumptions, everyday truths, and wisdom about people and how they work in organizations. The prevailing management paradigm focuses heavily on control, order and compliance, with the manager acting as policeman, referee or drill sergeant. Coaches focus on actions that enable and empower employees to contribute more effectively. Coaches challenge employees, won't let them "off the hook", help employees to be their best, and serve as catalysts to release the employee and team potential (Armentrout, 1995, p.3).

Effectiveness is the concept around which coaching should be tied. There are several reasons why the manager should be a good coach. The first is that coaching leads to the development of sound work skills. Coaching ensures that good work habits and the proper techniques are developed and sustained. The result is improved efficiency and effectiveness. Secondly, coaching improves the communicative relationship between supervisor and employee and facilitates the flow of information both upwardly and downwardly. Free and easy communication vertically and horizontally enhances morale and builds more productivity through smarter work, a better understanding of company policies and procedures, and fewer errors and absences (Knippen and Green, 1990).

### COACHING ACTIONS

What is a coach and what does a coach do? A review of literature on coaching reveals several definitions and working models; yet, all of these have one thing in common - coaching is team management, team leadership and employee empowerment.

Perhaps a good way to look at the difference between a "boss" and a "coach" is to compare the two, side by side (Brown, 1990, p.8).

#### Boss

Thinks he should control all the incompetents who work for him.

Sees the organization as one of independent people and functions.

Keeps people in the "dark" maintaining control of information

The boss is the one person who needs to be challenged.

Limits recognition to special occasions and events

Spends hours in closed door management sessions

#### Coach

Sees his people as a team that needs guidance, not control.

Sees the organization as one of interdependence/cohesion

Keeps people in the "light" sharing information

The team is the group that is in need of challenging work.

Sees recognition as the fuel of motivation and success

Asserts his place is with the team, building esprit de corps

What does a coach do? What are the specific elements of coaching that are exhibited by outstanding

coaches?

Robert W. Lucas states that feedback and communication are key elements for all coaches. His six steps to improved performance through coaching include 1) State your observations; 2) Describe your feelings about the performance; 3) Explain the impact of the performance; 4) Solicit understanding, agreement and/or commitment; 5) Make suggestions for improvement; and 6) Reinforce support through positive feedback (Lucas, 1994, p.7).

Kinlaw provides four areas of coaching that must be in effect if the coach is to achieve the best possible performance from his or her employees and bring the employees to a state of "commitment" to the organization (Kinlaw, 1989, pp.22-23). First, counseling refers to the identification of problems and the roads to resolution which are within the power of the employee; mentoring identifies to the employee the special values and idiosyncrasies of upper management and is political in nature; tutoring is a manner in which the coach provides the employee with a means to improve his or her technical competencies and those abilities which will provide a road to career improvement; and confronting is necessary to identify an employee's performance shortcomings and provide detail on what is needed to eliminate them. All of the specific functions of a coach, seemingly no matter who prescribes them, deal with performance review, performance feedback, showing, teaching and consistent and continuous team management.

Coaches allow employees freedom to act and create and permit ownership of performance goals and accountability for nonperformance.

Marilyn J. Darling (Darling, 1994, p.73) puts coaching in terms of respect and disrespect for employees and in terms of validation, inquiry, possibility and responsibility, as described below:

	<u><b>If I disrespect you</b></u>	<u><b>If I respect you</b></u>
<b>Validation</b>	I give orders without an explanation	I take time to set a context for our work
<b>Inquiry</b>	I construct elaborate theories to explain your behavior	I ask questions to understand you
<b>Possibility</b>	I focus on short-term expectations	I keep the long-term perspective
<b>Responsibility</b>	I see "you" versus "us"	I become your partner

## **COACHING BEHAVIORS**

Let us now look at specific coaching behaviors which influence the actions and morale of personnel within the organization.

Steven J. Stowell conducted a study (Stowell 1988, p.36-37) within a major service organization with units in nearly every state. Twenty-six participants from lower, middle and executive level were surveyed in a semistructured interview and engaged in actual coaching discussions. Employees of the twenty-six were also surveyed. Forty-seven specific coaching actions and behaviors emerged from the study, each falling into one of the three following categories:

1. Supportive behaviors. The leader's words and actions showed consideration, concern, and acceptance of the employees. These behaviors reduced tension and facilitated open communication.
2. Nonsupportive behaviors. The leaders expressed aggression and power. The messages were adversarial and hostile.
3. Initiating behaviors. The leaders attempted to initiate and structure an action-oriented,

problem-analysis discussion. These actions tended to challenge the employee and stimulate a resolution.

The results were crystal clear. The highly effective leaders and successful coaching episodes were characterized by high levels of supportive behaviors, by low levels of nonsupportive behaviors, and moderate amounts of initiating behaviors. Stowell goes on to say that leaders must achieve a balance between being supportive and caring, and being clear and direct. Employees seem to want coaching as long as leaders are not over controlling and authoritarian. Bottom line: coaching is neither simple nor easy.

### CASE STUDIES

The following case studies were taken from a national policy report by the Work Institute in America (Roscow 1992, passim):

#### Procter and Gamble

The company's Newland Plant was under pressure to improve its business results amidst heavy competition and rapid technological change. A new plant manager arrived and first noticed that every manager in the plant was doing the work of the level below him or her. He felt it necessary to make drastic changes and wanted to see his managers as trainers, coaches and leaders, not front-line employees.

He asked the managers and supervisors to review what they were doing vice what they felt they should be doing. Amazingly, the group challenged their own roles and actions. After developing new job descriptions, the group was further amazed at how much room there was for improvement. A plan was developed to free themselves of direct supervision - what they were currently doing - and move towards addressing issues such as breakthrough improvements in Total Quality Management, lower costs, innovation, and higher morale among workers by using coaching and improved leadership techniques.

The plan was initiated and implemented over a twenty-four month process. The results were evident: formerly in the middle of the pack, the plant emerged as the division leader in almost every key business area. The managers and employees became fulfilled and challenged in their new roles and the teams showed great pride.

This study indicates how employee empowerment, through the tools of coaching and leadership, can renew the vigor of an organization and create a synergism which can raise the organization to new business heights.

#### Eastman Kodak

13 Room at Kodak Park is the department that turns naked plastic strips into color films for consumer and professional markets. The department employed about 200 personnel when a new manager took over.

Although 13 Room was a solid, consistent and competitive organization, the new manager felt it necessary to develop it into a world class organization. The current management practiced was the old fear-based military style, practiced so well that employees were kept in the dark, deterred from showing initiative, and were required to call the supervisors any time, day or night, when a problem arose so the supervisor could solve it for them.

The new manager decided it was necessary to change the job descriptions of all the managers and supervisors. Meeting in a study group, the group discussed twelve books each member had read regarding "high performance management".

Expanding their roles to include management systems, personnel and planning, the supervisors and managers soon realized it was necessary to rely increasingly on their subordinates for decision making and problem solving. Operations teams and process teams were formed by the employees to carry out their newly found roles. Training for team skills such as group communication, interactions, goal setting and consensus decision making was established.

Twenty-seven months after the start of the transformation, 13 Room had moved impressively ahead. Basic operating results (quality, cost, volume) were sharply improved; management organization, streamlined; and contrary to the conventional wisdom, no drop in production had occurred at any point

in the transition.

This case illustrates the trainer, coach and leader theory of management and empowering the employees to be a vital part of the organization can lead to productivity increases, commitment, effectiveness and efficiency.

#### Upjohn Company

The Upjohn Company (Daly 1986, 6,26), needing to revamp its distribution system for pet products to maintain its position in the marketplace, contracted with a management coach to assist the Upjohn management team in developing a working model for a modified distribution system which would meet its current needs.

Using brainstorming and other idea-generating techniques, the management coach was able to draw forth from the team the necessary information and data to put together a model of distribution which proved to be very effective. The coach acted as a facilitator; the information was there all the time in the minds of the team. It simply took someone to ask the right questions, put answers in perspective, and coordinate the fine-tuning required to put together a good working plan.

#### Conclusion

Department of Defense personnel are rapidly becoming a more important resource to the manager who, through necessity, must improve the productivity of his/her organization. The development of personnel skills and talents, heretofore hidden because of archaic and direct-style management methods, is a reality waiting for discovery. Coaching-style management fosters a relationship between the supervisor and employee and between the employee and the organization. Additionally, accountability for their actions and participation in decision making provide employees with a sense of - and the reality of - ownership in the processes and end products of the organization. Managers must understand that the more productive and satisfied the employees, the better the organization functions and, on a personal basis, the better the performance of the manager looks to superiors.

Coaching has proven time and again to be a real benefit to organizations experiencing downsizing or restructuring. As federal employees of the future change, more minorities and women will be members of technical, administrative and professional elements in the organization. These employees will become supervisors and managers of the future and should be trained in effective leadership and management practices as early as possible. Coaching will develop the techniques necessary to assure our current employees and future managers are productive owners of the processes they contribute to in the workplace of today.

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